

The Gregg and Livingston Harper Congressional Internship Program for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities (The Harper Intern Program)

FALL 2022

History

- Established by Rep. Gregg Harper in 2010 as the Congressional Internship Program for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities and was renamed in 2018.
- Rep. Harpers' advocacy was inspired by his son Livingston, and he sponsored many pieces of legislation to help those with disabilities.
- Goal: To help individuals grow and lead to the alumni of the program being hired on the Hill.
- The program works with George Mason University's LIFE program.
- To date, nearly 200 offices from the House and Senate have participated.

Mason LIFE

Harper Internship Overview

George Mason University

What is Mason LIFE?



- LIFE stands for Learning into Future Environments
- Four-year inclusive post-secondary, non-degree program.
- Educates students with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- Consists of 4 components:
 - Employment
 - Academics – Foundational & Exploration (University) Courses
 - Community Involvement
 - Independent Living
- As a certificate program, we mirror the degree-seeking experience.

Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities

- Impairment of general mental abilities that impact adaptive functioning in three areas:
 - Conceptual
 - Language, Reading, Writing, Math, Reasoning, Knowledge, Memory
 - Social
 - Empathy, Social Judgement, Interpersonal Communication Skills
 - Practical
 - Self-Regulation and Executive Functioning

*American Psychiatric Association –
Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)*

About LIFE Students:

- 2022-2023 Academic Year
 - 50 Students participating
 - Ages 18-27
- Students love the college experience:
 - Learning & trying new things
 - Hanging out with friends on and off campus
 - Movies
 - Concerts
 - Bowling
 - Sport Events
- Take pride in accomplishments and achieving independence



Overview of Employment Component

- Supports students in learning job-specific tasks, general employee responsibilities, and social behaviors appropriate for work environment
- Aids in development of professional portfolio
- Students placed in numerous settings on and off campus:
 - GMU President's office
 - Capitol Hill offices
 - Gyms
 - Bakery
 - Pet Spaw
 - Child Care
 - UPS
- Worksite placements based on numerous factors such as:
 - Skill level
 - Employment interest
 - Needs of Employer
 - Schedules
- Support Staff may be assigned based on intern's individualized needs, with ultimate goal of workplace independence



Role of Support Staff

- Support Staff are assigned to an intern based on individual need.
- Support Staff are current undergraduate or graduate students at George Mason University
 - Staff are trained upon hiring
- Support Staff serve two important purposes:
 - Support interns in learning job-specific tasks, general employee responsibilities, and social behaviors appropriate for the work environment
 - Supports the office in developing a relationship with the intern, learning how the individual learns/works best, and being a point of contact for questions or concerns within the work environment

What can a LIFE Intern do for you?

- Support your office by providing services in an area of need
- Bring a fresh perspective, unique skill set, and new ideas to your office
- Provide an opportunity for staff members of your office to increase their professional development by mentoring an intern
- Provide an opportunity to learn and increase your awareness about individuals with disabilities
- Allow for an opportunity to evaluate current office trainings, and day-to-day processes to ensure you are being inclusive
 - Showcase commitment to Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion



What can you do for a LIFE Intern?

- Provide a patient, friendly, and inclusive learning environment
- Be a role model and mentor
- Provide an opportunity for an intern to gain experience and professional skill development
- Expose an intern to the work force and allow them to explore numerous job tasks & responsibilities
- Make an impact by inspiring an intern to set goals and aspire for post- college opportunities in pursuing employment



Students' Work on the Hill

- **Students historically attend Capitol Hill offices on Fridays:**
 - 2 hours in a morning office (10am -12pm)
 - 2 hours in an afternoon office (1pm-3pm)



Capitol Hill Office Tasks

- **Students are capable of performing a variety of different work tasks.**
- **Previous examples, including, but not limited to:**
 - Data entry (constituent information)
 - Filing
 - Photocopying/scanning
 - Stuffing and sealing letters
 - Opening, sorting, distributing mail
 - Collection/distribution: mail, flag office, supply store, etc.
 - Signatures: (stamping, autopen)
 - Assisting/accompanying on tours
 - Organizing (desks, files, supplies)
- **Flexibility for additional tasks as well...**

Expectations of Worksites

- Communicate directly with intern regarding work tasks, responsibilities, feedback, etc.
 - Utilize support staff as needed
- Establish relationship with intern by building rapport
- Prepare meaningful work for intern for duration of internship
 - Provide a variety of tasks for entire shift
- Showcase patience and understanding
 - Mistakes may happen and this is how interns will learn & grow
- Utilize person-first language
 - For example: A person with autism vs. an autistic person
- Ensure there is adequate work space for student
- Communicate any large overarching concerns with Mason LIFE Staff as needed
- Commit to participation for semester period (average 15 weeks)

How Can We Be Successful Together?

- Maintain open line of communication
 - We are a team
- Be patient and understanding
- Agree to terms established in partnership
 - Work expectations for students
- Keep ultimate mission in mind:
 - We are helping a student develop and practice skills to achieve a level of independence and success in employment

Thank You!

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Fall 2022 Intern Program

- September 2nd – December 2nd
- Two sessions on Fridays
 - 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.
 - 1:00 p.m.-3:00 p.m.
- Planning to do a Redcoat tour of the Capitol in October and a speaker event in November
- Sign-up is through Google Forms
 - The link will be sent out after the briefing
 - Dear E-Colleague
 - CHA Republican Website

Fall 2022 Intern Program

- Please request a badge through the House ID office for your intern
- Volunteering for the program is a commitment to the interns
- Monday, August 22nd: 2nd informational briefing regarding different tasks that the interns can partake in and best practices
- Monday, September 19th: Check-in to see how things are going and to answer questions

Q&A